

DOES THE CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND DELIVER ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT? INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITIES IN MWANZA AND MARA REGIONS, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in promoting rural development in Tanzania, focusing on four constituencies in the Lake Zone: Musoma Town, Magu, Tarime Rural, and Tarime Town. The aim is to assess the effectiveness and challenges of the CDF in enhancing local development, particularly in health, education, and infrastructure sectors. Utilizing a convergent parallel research design, the study combines quantitative and qualitative data. Data were gathered from 400 randomly selected individuals through semi-structured questionnaires, complemented by 36 key informant interviews and four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), one for each constituency. Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data underwent content analysis. Findings indicate that 83% of respondents believe effective leadership by Members of Parliament (MPs) is crucial for proper fund utilization, and 50% recognize the CDF as essential for community-based development projects. However, 45% reported concerns regarding transparency and accountability among CDF officials, highlighting issues of corruption and limited community involvement in planning and fund management. The study concludes that while the CDF holds potential, its effectiveness is compromised by governance challenges. The policy recommendations include strengthening monitoring and auditing mechanisms, fostering inclusive decision-making among community members and stakeholders, and ensuring local authorities oversee fund usage throughout the project cycle to enhance transparency, accountability, and development outcomes.

KEY WORDS: Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Development projects, Rural development, Communities, Tanzania

1. INTRODUCTION

In Africa, CDFs are utilized to support development in several countries, including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Liberia, Rwanda, and Zambia (Centre for International Development, 2019). Various organizations and scholars define CDFs differently. According to the Centre for International Development (2019), a CDF is "the generic name for a policy tool that dedicates public money to benefit specific political subdivisions through allocations and/or spending decisions influenced by their representatives in the national government." Additionally, the impact of the CDF on rural development varies across countries due to differences in governance structures, institutional capacities, and political dynamics. Oyoo et al. (2020) provide insights into the experiences of various African countries with similar decentralized development funds, highlighting that while the CDF approach has the potential to empower local communities and stimulate grassroots development (Money et al., 2023), challenges such as corruption, patronage politics, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms can hinder its intended impact (Mitullah, 2015).

In Tanzania, the CDF was established under the Constituencies Development Catalyst Funds Act (CAP.96 R.E.2015). The Parliament has implemented various reforms to address development issues, striving to create a more enabling environment for effective fund utilization. These funds are allocated to Members of Parliament through local government authorities (LGAs) to which their constituencies belong. The impact of the CDF on rural development in Tanzania has gained significant attention for its potential to address local development needs (Mgani et al., 2020a). As a decentralization initiative, the central government allocates CDFs directly to constituencies to empower communities and improve their living conditions. While proponents argue that the CDF enhances local governance and infrastructure development (Robertson et al., 2020; Hapompwe et al., 2020), critics raise concerns about accountability and equitable distribution (Mumba, 2020; Mgani et al., 2020b; Kinoti & Sang, 2022).

Moreover, Financing development projects for rural community development is an escalating agenda in many developing countries (Mgulo & Kamazima, 2022; Kapologwe et al., 2020; Kapologwe et al., 2019). Governments in less developed countries have been investing in various development projects in both rural and urban areas to improve living standards through diverse funding sources (Kullaya et al., 2022; Arkedis et al., 2021; González-Rodrigo et al., 2022). One significant source of development funds is the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), which aims to promote social and economic development in these areas. The CDF is prominent in many developing nations, with approximately 23 countries worldwide implementing this funding scheme for community development (Wamugu & Ogollah, 2017).

Introduced by the Tanzanian government in 2008, the CDF serves as a financial mechanism designed to promote rural community development by allocating resources directly to constituencies. However, the effectiveness of the CDF in achieving its intended goals remains a topic of considerable debate and scrutiny. While the fund was established to empower local communities and enhance living standards, significant concerns about its actual impact on rural development persist (Daudi, 2023). Key issues include the transparency and efficiency of fund allocation, raising questions about whether resources reach their intended beneficiaries or are mismanaged at various levels (Chulu et al., 2021). Furthermore, community participation in the planning and implementation of CDF projects is critical to their success; without active involvement from local residents, these projects may fail to address the specific needs and priorities of the community (Mgani et al., 2020a; Thomas & Makwai, 2022).

Besides, the sustainability of CDF initiatives is a pressing concern (Ndhlovu & Kumari, 2024; Mweetwa & Haabazoka, 2025). Many projects may demonstrate short-term benefits but struggle to deliver lasting improvements in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Makwai, 2022). This underscores the need for a thorough evaluation of the outcomes associated with CDF investments, as well as an exploration of barriers hindering effective project implementation. David and Kachamba (2024) contend that bureaucratic challenges, corruption, and inadequate capacity within local governance structures can significantly restrict the CDF's potential to foster meaningful development.

Meanwhile, Poverty remains prevalent, and social services such as health centers and schools are often underdeveloped (Miyoba, 2019). There is widespread distrust regarding the use of funds, which frequently end up in the hands of a select few (Mgani et al., 2020b). Tanzania, as a developing country, strives to reduce poverty, particularly in rural areas, through various development projects, including the construction and improvement of schools, roads, and health centers.

Although many studies such as David and Kachamba (2024), Ndhlovu & Kumari (2024), and Mweetwa & Haabazoka (2025) have investigated the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in broad or generalized ways often relying on mixed methods, cross-sectional assessments, or aggregated stakeholder perceptions there remains a substantive gap in how CDF performs specifically as a rural development instrument within distinct sub-regional realities. In particular, the existing literature does not sufficiently disaggregate rural outcomes by community-level needs, implementation processes, and local governance dynamics that shape whether CDF spending translates into sustained improvements in rural livelihoods, services, and infrastructure. Moreover, Mwanza and Mara regions offer different socio-economic and geographic contexts that may condition CDF effectiveness, yet the evidence tends to be either regionally non-specific or not designed to compare how rural communities experience CDF benefits and limitations in practice. As a result, the gap this study addresses are the need for context-grounded insights that link CDF design and delivery mechanisms to rural development results as perceived by communities, rather than treating “CDF effectiveness” as a uniform phenomenon across rural Tanzania.

Therefore, this study aims to critically assess the role of the CDF in rural community development in Tanzania, providing evidence-based insights into its effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. A novel aspect of this study is the utilization of a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to analyze the complex dynamics within the CDF framework in Tanzania. Thus, by addressing these complexities, the research seeks to offer valuable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, ultimately enhancing the CDF's impact on rural communities and supporting broader objectives of sustainable development and poverty alleviation. This study is guided by two key questions: 1. What are the key factors for effective utilization of the CDF in promoting rural development in constituencies? 2. What are the challenges behind the utilization of the CDF in Tanzanian constituencies? Thus, this study provides valuable insights into the practical impact of the Constituency Development Fund on rural development at the community level. Its findings are essential for informing policy reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in local development financing.

This paper for the rest of its body is organized as follows; section 2 provides literature review, section 3 gives details methods and materials, section 4 present results and discussion, section 5 conclusion and policy implications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our study borrows the central idea prescribed by Mace's production theory (1979). He asserts that the theory explains how inputs and outputs are related. This association explains the highest output that may be produced by each fixed input from an economic perspective. Based on this approach, a constituency development fund is viewed as a process of production that combines a variety of inputs, such as good leadership, community participation, and a monitoring system in place to

transform one set of inputs into an output for the development of the community. In this study, the output is social service delivery or development projects.

We adopt this theory because it connects with the central idea of study, which aims to investigate how it works and why CDF is important for rural community development in Tanzania (Maye et al, 2020). The CDF is therefore an input that is used to project initiatives in rural areas to promote rural development by changing the living status of people through access to better social services, such as health centers and better education facilities. The core problem facing rural communities is poverty, where the majority live in poor conditions (Brockington, 2021; Konje et al, 2020). Moreover, the central government provides funds through the MPs' funding scheme, known as CDF. After a particular period of time, the money is utilized to finance rural projects, which are completed and then given to the communities for use. The projects implemented and financed include the construction and improvement of health centers and facilities, primary and secondary school classrooms/facilities, roads, public toilets, and electricity rehabilitation. All such projects had an impact on the decrease in poverty among rural residents since, for instance, one can begin receiving health services close to his or her village rather than spending a lot of time and money travelling a great distance for such services.

Besides, in most developing countries, government and donor financing are thought to be a driver for rural development by promoting better well-being through development project initiatives (Zhang et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2019). Development projects play a vital role in improving the well-being of rural societies through access to improved social services. Rural communities in most countries, including Tanzania, experience poor social services such as poor road infrastructure, poor health services, and poor education facilities (Adatara et al, 2021). The study assumes that the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) provided by the government enhances access to social and economic services, thereby improving the well-being of rural communities. Therefore, this study assumes CDF works as an input for promoting rural community development by facilitating the completion of development projects effectively in rural Tanzania. Thus, producing reliable outputs is the real socioeconomic development of rural people.

2.2 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

To present the literature reviewed in this study in a coherent and thematic manner, we reviewed a number of studies that closely cut across the core themes underpinning our investigation, namely governance and accountability, community participation, political interference, and project performance. This thematic approach is intended to situate the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) within the broader institutional and social mechanisms through which it is planned, approved, implemented, and monitored at the community level. By synthesizing evidence across these interconnected areas, the review helps clarify how governance and accountability arrangements may influence resource use and service delivery, how community participation can shape local priorities and ownership of projects, how political interference may affect project selection and implementation quality, and how project performance such as timeliness, relevance, and sustainability ultimately reflects (and potentially reinforces) the effectiveness or limitations of the CDF as a rural development tool.

Harris and Posner (2019) investigated whether politicians use the CDF to reward political supporters in Kenya using innovative spatial modelling techniques and data on the precise geo-locations. Their study revealed only weak evidence that Members of Parliament (MPs) direct CDF projects preferentially toward areas inhabited by their political allies, after accounting for factors such as population density, poverty rates, ethnic composition, and proximity to roads. Conversely, Nthiga and Moi (2021) using descriptive analysis method observed that active participation of community members in prioritizing CDF-funded projects led to higher levels of satisfaction and enhanced the perceived relevance of those initiatives in Kenya.

Oyoo et al. (2020) conducted a study in Kenya using descriptive statistics methods reported that CDF bursaries were predominantly allocated to orphans, academically talented, and economically disadvantaged students. Despite the growing demand surpassing available resources, their findings revealed a strong positive correlation between bursary allocations and student enrolment rates ($r = 0.745$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring the potential of CDF in promoting educational access.

While still looking at Kenya context, Okaka (2019) by using descriptive and inferential analysis methods established a statistically significant relationship between project performance and factors such as monitoring and control, financial resources, stakeholder engagement, feedback mechanisms, and knowledge of CDF guidelines. Akwalu and Muchai (2020) reported that devolved funding significantly improved community welfare in Tigania East constituency, with youth projects, health initiatives, infrastructure, and education contributing substantially. In addition, Kimirri (2018) observed a positive correlation between political participation and CDF utilization, but noted a negative correlation between poverty levels and the effectiveness of CDF in rural development. Akong'o and Oluoch (2017) highlighted communication deficiencies in Rongo and Uriri constituencies, which hindered community engagement due to limited dissemination of CDF-related information. Ali (2019), studying Wajir West Constituency, confirmed that project initiation, financial planning, and implementation processes significantly influenced the performance of CDF projects. The study revealed a shortfall of over Kenya shillings 4,850,000 in allocated funds and highlighted a lack of community involvement in project identification, implementation, and monitoring due to limited knowledge about the CDF system. Malik (2021) further demonstrated that ruling party interests influenced fund distribution, disproportionately favoring political allies and marginalizing opposition strongholds.

In Tanzania, existing studies on Constituency Development Fund (CDF) revealed critical insights into implementation challenges, governance issues, and community involvement (Daudi, 2022; Thomas & Makwai, 2022). Previous studies highlight that Tanzania's CDF has supported local service delivery, notably in health and education infrastructure (Mallya and Kessy, 2013; Daudi, 2022; Makwai, 2022). However, governance challenges persist, including political interference, weak accountability, and limited community participation. Transparency mechanisms such as social audits remain underutilized, reducing local oversight (Daudi, 2022). Project selection is often MP-driven, undermining decentralized planning structures. Moreover, there is limited integration with other local funding mechanisms, risking duplication (Daudi, 2023).

Overall, after reviewing the literature, a clear research gap emerges in how CDF delivery mechanisms translate into rural development outcomes through the combined influence of governance and accountability, community participation, political interference, and project performance. Specifically, prior studies tend to examine these dimensions separately or in generic terms, without sufficiently unpacking how they jointly operate within different community contexts such as varying local capacity, participation practices, and implementation dynamics. As a result, there is limited evidence on the extent to which communities in rural areas experience CDF as effectively responsive, transparent, and sustainable, and on the specific pathways through which these interrelated factors shape rural development impacts in practice. Thus, this study will fill this gap by utilizing of a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to analyze the complex dynamics within the CDF framework in Tanzania using primary survey data from Mwanza and Mara regions within rural contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in four constituencies in Tanzania: Musoma Town, Tarime Town, and Tarime Rural in the Mara Region, and Magu in Magu District of the Mwanza Region. These areas were purposively selected because of the presence of completed or ongoing projects funded through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). Basically, Mwanza and Mara regions provide a compelling representation of Tanzania's diverse socio-economic landscape due to their contrasting yet complementary characteristics. Mwanza, located along the southern shores of Lake Victoria, is the country's second-largest urban center and a hub for trade, fisheries, and industrial activity (Zong et al., 2023). Its economy reflects the dynamics of urbanization, commercialization, and integration into national and regional markets. Additionally, according to the 2022 national census, Mwanza Region has an estimated population of about 3,699,872 people (NBS, 2022). Mara region, by contrast, is predominantly rural, with livelihoods centered on subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and small-scale trade (Jambau, 2021). Its population according to updated regional profile of 2024 is 2,372,015 as of 2022 census (NBS, 2022). The juxtaposition of Mwanza's semi-urbanized economy with Mara's agrarian and pastoral communities captures the breadth of Tanzania's development challenges, ranging from urban growth pressures to rural poverty and resource dependence.

Moreover, both regions embody the socio-cultural diversity that shapes rural development outcomes in Tanzania. Mwanza is characterized by ethnic heterogeneity and a relatively high level of infrastructural development, while Mara is marked by strong traditional institutions, community-based resource management, and cross-border interactions with Kenya. Together, they illustrate how rural development policies, such as the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), must navigate varied contexts urban-rural linkages, cultural traditions, and differing levels of economic integration. Thus, by situating the study in Mwanza and Mara, the research captures both the opportunities and constraints of rural development interventions across Tanzania's diverse socio-economic settings, thereby enhancing the generalizability and policy relevance of the findings.

3.2 SAMPLING FRAME

This study's sampling frame of 400 respondents comprised rural communities within Mwanza and Mara Regions, Tanzania, selected to reflect variation in local administrative and socio-economic settings relevant to Constituency Development Fund (CDF) implementation and rural development experiences. The sampling frame was constructed using available local administrative structures and CDF project coverage in the study areas, ensuring that communities included had been exposed to CDF-funded interventions during the period of interest. From this frame, study participants were drawn across key local stakeholder groups such as community members, local leaders, and participants involved in CDF-related decision-making and project monitoring to capture diverse perspectives on governance and accountability, community participation, political interference, and project performance. This approach supported the generation of community-level evidence while maintaining geographic and contextual representativeness across the two regions.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS

A convergent parallel mixed descriptive methods research design was adopted to align with the study's objectives (Figure 1). This design was chosen for its ability to integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches, allowing the strengths of one method to compensate for the limitations of the other (Demir & Pismek, 2018). Moreover, it enhances internal reliability and enables the triangulation of data by corroborating insights from multiple sources.

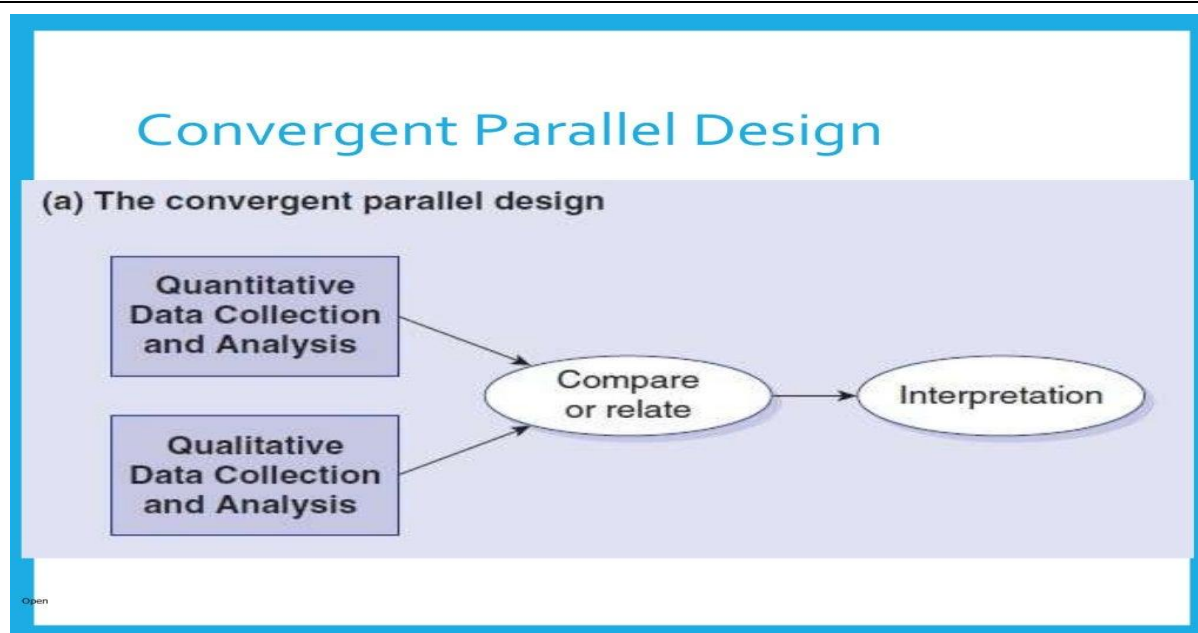


Figure 1: Convergence parallel mixed methods design

Source: Adapted from Demir and Pismek (2018)

The study utilised primary data collected from community members across the four selected districts, using a questionnaire as the principal tool to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher through semi-structured interviews with respondents. The target population consisted of individuals residing within the four selected constituencies, from which a sample of 400 respondents was randomly drawn. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with various development stakeholders, including eight (8) councillors from both the ruling and opposition parties, four (4) District Executive Directors, four (4) Members of Parliament (MPs), and four (4) government appointed project officers, as well as sixteen (16) village leaders. These interviews aimed to obtain qualitative insights to complement the primary data gathered through key informants' interviews.

Furthermore, four (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held, one in each district, with up to 10 participants per group, moderated by the researcher. The FGDs facilitated the triangulation of information collected through individual interviews with community members. The study also involved a review of key documents available in district and parliamentary offices, alongside secondary data drawn from local government records, academic journals, and relevant materials from Members of Parliament's offices.

The following is a summary of the key informants reached through consultative meetings/interviews, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of visited KIs in four selected constituencies in Lake Zone

Location	Respondent type	Number in total
Musoma Town	Councilors =2; DED=1, Project officer=1, MP=1 and Village leaders=4	9
Magu	Councilors=2; DED=1, Project officer=1, MP=1 and Village leaders=4	9
Tarime Town	Councilors=2; DED=1, Project officer=1, MP=1 and Village leaders=4	9
Tarime Rural	Councilors =2; DED=1, Project officer=1, MP =1 and Village leaders=4	9
Total		36

Key: DED=District Executive Director, MP= Member of Parliament (Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The quantitative data collected through individual interviews were cleaned, coded, and descriptively analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The analyzed data are presented in terms of descriptions, tables, and charts. The qualitative data collected through FGDs and key informant interviews were analyzed using content analysis to complement and compare with the quantitative findings during the interpretation stage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study provides important context for assessing the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in rural community development in Tanzania. The findings reveal that the majority of participants were male (74.5%), with females accounting for only 25.5% (Table 2). This gender imbalance reflects broader societal norms and decision-making patterns in rural Tanzania, where men often dominate community leadership and access to resources (Mwaipopo, 2021). Consequently, CDF project planning and implementation may risk overlooking women's priorities unless deliberate efforts are made to promote gender inclusivity.

The age distribution shows a predominance of individuals aged between 35 and 45 years (70.5%), indicating a relatively mature and active working population (Table 2). This age group is typically more engaged in community affairs and development activities, which could enhance the uptake and sustainability of CDF initiatives. However, the relatively low representation of youth (22.5%) raises concerns, as younger people are key to innovation and long-term sustainability in development processes (Lawi & Madaha, 2022).

In terms of education, the study uncovered a balanced mix of educational attainment, with a notable 25.7% of respondents having non-formal education and only 23.8% attaining university education (Table 2). The high proportion of individuals with limited formal education could pose challenges in understanding and participating in CDF processes, especially where project proposals, budgeting, or monitoring require technical knowledge (Ndumbaro, 2020). This highlights the need for inclusive communication strategies and community training to ensure equitable participation.

The study results in Table 2 indicate a heavy reliance on agriculture, with 77.3% of respondents identifying as farmers. This aligns with the broader economic structure of rural Tanzania and suggests that CDF investments should prioritize agricultural infrastructure, access to inputs, and market connectivity to yield meaningful impacts (Temu et al., 2023). Despite the potential of the CDF to address such priorities, past assessments have indicated that funds are often directed towards politically visible infrastructure rather than projects that address pressing livelihood needs (Chindengwike et al., 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest that for the CDF to be truly effective in rural development, it must be responsive to the demographic realities of the communities it serves. Tailoring CDF-funded projects to the needs of predominantly male, middle-aged, agrarian populations while also making space for women's and youths' voices could enhance both the relevance and the impact of the fund. Additionally, building the capacity of communities, particularly those with lower educational attainment, is critical to ensuring that CDF processes are participatory, transparent, and equitable.

Table 2: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics of respondents		Location of the respondents				
		Tarime town	Magu	Tarime Rural	Musoma town	Total n =400
Sex	Male	76 (19)	75 (18.8)	76 (19)	71 (18)	298 (74.5)
	Female	26 (6.5)	26 (6.2)	27 (6.8)	23 (5.8)	102 (25.5)
Age	18-35	23 (5.8)	22 (5.5)	24 (6)	21 (5.2)	90 (22.5)
	35-45	72 (18)	71 (17.8)	72 (18)	67 (16.8)	282 (70.5)
	>45	7 (1.8)	7 (1.8)	7 (1.8)	7 (1.8)	28 (7)
Education	Primary	48 (12)	52 (13)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	102 (25.5)
	Secondary	47 (11.8)	51 (12.8)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	100 (25)
	University	45 (11.2)	48 (12)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	95 (23.8)
	Non-formal	49 (12.2)	52 (13)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	103 (25.7)
Occupation	Businessman	8 (2)	8 (2)	8 (2)	8 (2)	8 (2)
	Farmer	79 (19.8)	78 (19.5)	80 (20)	72 (18)	309 (77.3)
	Employee	4 (1)	4 (1)	4 (1)	4 (1)	16 (4)
	Pastoralist	11 (2.75)	10 (2.5)	11 (2.75)	11 (2.75)	43 (10.8)

Source: Field Survey (2024)

4.2 ALLOCATION OF CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND

The disbursement trends presented in Table 3 illustrate the increasing amounts of funds provided by the central government to Members of Parliament to support constituency-level development through local authorities. For example, allocations to the Magu constituency rose from Sh. 65,000,000 in 2018 to Sh. 84,000,000 in 2022, an increase of 22 per cent. This upward trend demonstrates the growing potential of CDF to catalyze rural development. Moreover, the consistent increase in CDF budget allocations signals a parallel expansion in the delivery of social services in rural areas. This predictable and incremental funding mechanism allows the state and local governments to plan more effectively for future improvements in social service provision, household welfare, and local economic progress. These findings align with those of Casey et al. (2021), whose study in Zambia reported a significant increase in CDF allocations in 2022 following several years of underfunding. Furthermore, the observed results are consistent with production function theory, which posits that increased investment in development inputs, such as funding for constituencies, leads to improved outputs, in this case reflected by enhanced public service delivery.

Table 3: Allocation of CDFs for the past five years in some constituencies in Tanzania (TZ currency)

Constituencies	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Magu	65,000,000	65,000,000	65,000,000	68,000,000	84,000,000	347,000,000
Musoma town	36,616,000	36,616,000	36,616,000	59,981,000	59,981,000	229,810,000
Tarime TC	33,766,000	33,766,000	33,766,000	33,766,000	57,132,000	192,196,000
Tarime Rural	52,216,000	52,216,000	52,216,000	52,216,000	75,518,000	284,382,000

Source: The Budget Committee's Report (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2023).

4.3 KEY FACTORS FOR THE EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF CDF IN PROMOTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The findings of this study reveal that the leadership of Members of Parliament (MPs) is perceived as the most critical factor influencing the effective utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Tanzania. Out of 400 respondents, 83.3% (333 individuals) identified good leadership by MPs as key to successful constituency development (Table 4). This overwhelming majority underscores the central role that Councillorship plays in shaping local development outcomes. Similar observations have been made in Kenya and Malawi, where the personal commitment, transparency, and development agenda of the MP significantly influenced the prioritisation and implementation of CDF projects (Kimani & Kombo, 2019; Nyirenda & Kalyani, 2023).

On the other hand, only 7.8% (31 respondents) cited proper fund management by local officials as a major contributing factor (Table 4). This suggests that while technical administration is important, it is often seen as secondary to the leadership and initiative taken by the MP. Akwalu and Muchai (2020) also noted in their study of Kenya's CDF that community members often associate project success more with the visibility and responsiveness of their MP than with bureaucratic processes.

Community participation was reported by 7% (28 respondents), indicating a limited recognition of grassroots involvement in CDF-funded projects (Table 4). This low percentage raises concerns, as it points to either insufficient mechanisms for community engagement or a lack of awareness among citizens about their role in shaping development priorities. Andhoga et al. (2018) argue that when community participation is weak, development projects often fail to reflect local needs, leading to poor sustainability and misuse of funds. The findings suggest a need for more inclusive planning and civic education to encourage local ownership of development initiatives.

Only 2% (8 respondents) acknowledged the role of central government monitoring as a key factor in fund utilisation (Table 4). This reflects a broader challenge in the decentralisation framework, where oversight mechanisms may exist in theory but are either weakly enforced or poorly understood at the local level. Musamba and Phiri (2019) emphasise that without strong accountability systems, decentralised funds like the CDF can be vulnerable to misappropriation and political capture.

The dominant view that MPs drive the effective use of the CDF reflects both the opportunities and risks associated with such a system. On one hand, strong and visionary MPs can leverage the fund to deliver tangible community benefits. On the other hand, the centralisation of influence in a single political figure can reduce transparency and limit broader stakeholder involvement. This finding aligns with the production function theory, which posits that increased and well-directed investment (inputs), such as CDF allocations, especially when effectively managed, will result in improved development outcomes (outputs), such as enhanced service delivery and development of infrastructures.

Table 4: Key factors for the effective utilization of CDF in the constituency development

Key factors confirmed	No. of respondents	Percentage
Good leadership of MP	333	83.3
Good management of funds by officials	31	7.8
Presence of a monitoring system from the central government	8	2
Community participation	28	7
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Furthermore, it was confirmed during key informant interviews at the Musoma town constituency that one key informant had this to say: ‘ *We are proud of our MP because he ensures the funds are used accordingly in improving the roads and building of the health centers in our village, he is a good leader....*’(Key Informant Interview in Musoma town constituency, July, 2024). This implies that good parliamentary leadership speeds up rural development projects. Furthermore, enforcing the implementation of CDF activities has become easier as members of parliament have made it part of their political agenda to seek re-election.

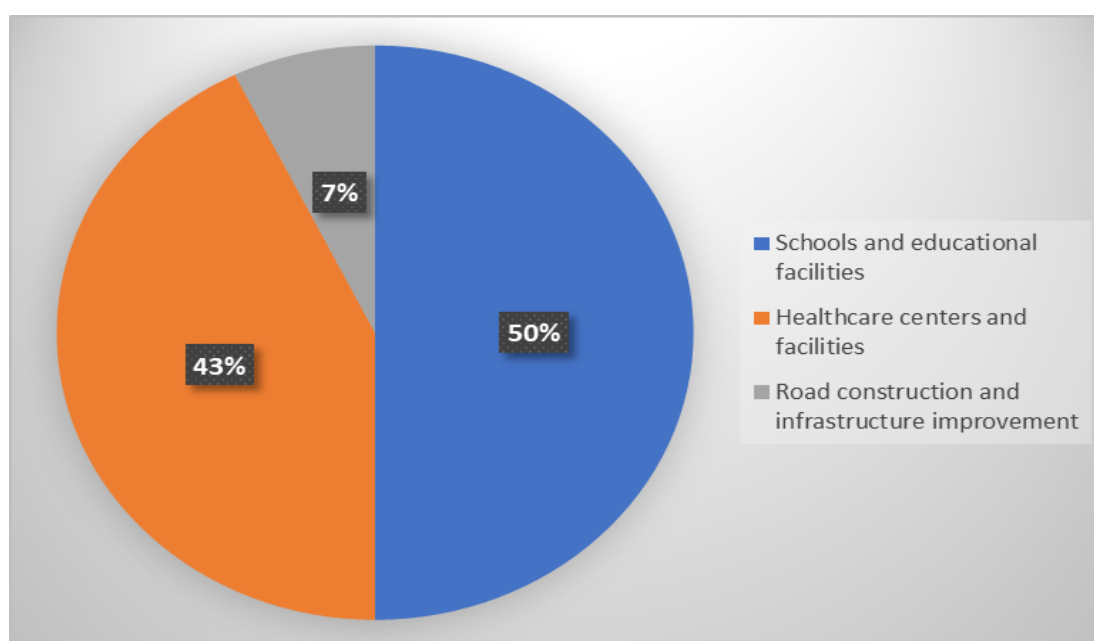


Figure 2: Key areas where the CDF made a development impact in rural communities, Tanzania

Source: Field Survey (2024)

During the study survey, consultative meetings with various key informants had this to say;

.... The Constituency Development Fund is important for improving rural areas. These areas often have poor living conditions, and many people live in poverty. Our goal is to make sure the funds are used properly so that people see real change. When the money is used well, it helps the national government improve rural life...” (Key informant interview, Magu Constituency, 6th October, 2023).

The study findings from Figure 2 reveal the perceived areas where the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has made the greatest impact in rural communities. A majority of respondents, 50% indicated that the CDF has contributed most significantly to schools and education facilities. This includes the construction of classrooms, renovation of school buildings, provision of desks, and learning materials. This emphasis reflects the central role education plays in rural development priorities and mirrors findings in Kenya and Malawi, where education consistently ranks as the top recipient of CDF allocations due to its high community visibility and long-term social returns (Kimani & Kombo, 2019; Nyirenda & Kalyani, 2023).

Closely following education, 43% of respondents stated that the CDF has made a substantial contribution to health centres and healthcare facilities. Improvements cited include the building of dispensaries, maternal health units, and the provision of basic medical supplies. These developments have played a vital role in improving access to healthcare in underserved

rural areas, reducing travel distances for patients and improving overall community health outcomes. This trend is consistent with findings by Musamba and Phiri (2019), who emphasised the importance of targeted CDF investment in health infrastructure to complement national health strategies at the local level.

In contrast, only 7% of respondents perceived that the CDF had a notable impact on road construction and infrastructure improvements. While road access is essential for connecting rural communities to markets and public services, this lower percentage may reflect either limited CDF allocations to infrastructure or the higher costs and complexity involved in such projects. As Akwalu and Muchai (2020) noted, CDF allocations often favour lower-cost projects that produce quick, visible results, which may explain the relative underrepresentation of road infrastructure in these perceptions.

4.4 CHALLENGES BEHIND THE UTILIZATION OF CDF IN THE CONSTITUENCIES

Figure 3 presents community perceptions of the main challenges affecting the effective utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in rural Tanzania. The findings highlight six primary issues, with varying degrees of severity based on their frequency among respondents.

The leading challenge, cited by 44.5% of respondents, is the lack of transparency and accountability in the management of CDF resources. Community members reported insufficient information about how funds are allocated, which projects are selected, and how the funds are ultimately spent. This lack of openness creates suspicion, limits citizen trust, and reduces oversight. According to Nyirenda and Kalyani (2023), effective transparency mechanisms such as publishing CDF budgets and expenditures are essential for preventing misuse and enhancing community confidence in local development initiatives.

Corruption was the second most cited challenge, identified by 25% of respondents. This includes concerns over misappropriation of funds, inflated procurement costs, and nepotism in contractor selection. These perceptions align with research from Musamba and Phiri (2021), who emphasised that weak institutional controls in the CDF framework have made it susceptible to corrupt practices, particularly in contexts where oversight is minimal.

A further 13.5% of respondents pointed to limited community involvement and participation as a critical issue. Many communities feel excluded from decision-making processes, particularly in identifying priority projects. This undermines the principles of participatory development and leads to the implementation of projects that may not meet actual community needs. As Andhoga et al. (2018) highlight, inclusive planning processes not only ensure relevance but also improve sustainability and accountability.

Inadequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms were noted by 7% of respondents. Communities expressed concern that once projects begin, there is little follow-up or assessment to ensure quality and proper implementation. Without effective M&E, it becomes challenging to measure progress, learn from past experiences, or hold implementers accountable. Casey et al. (2021) underscores the value of strong monitoring systems in enhancing project outcomes and promoting transparency in the use of public funds.

Political interference was identified by 6% of respondents. This includes instances where projects are selected or altered to suit political agendas rather than responding to community priorities. While MPs are expected to guide local development, excessive political influence can distort fair allocation of resources (Akwalu & Muchai, 2020).

Lastly, 4% of respondents mentioned insufficient fund allocation as a barrier to achieving meaningful development outcomes. Though relatively less cited, this concern is still important, particularly for constituencies with large geographic areas or urgent infrastructure needs. Temu et al. (2023) argue that without adequate funding levels, even well-planned and prioritised projects may remain incomplete or poorly executed.

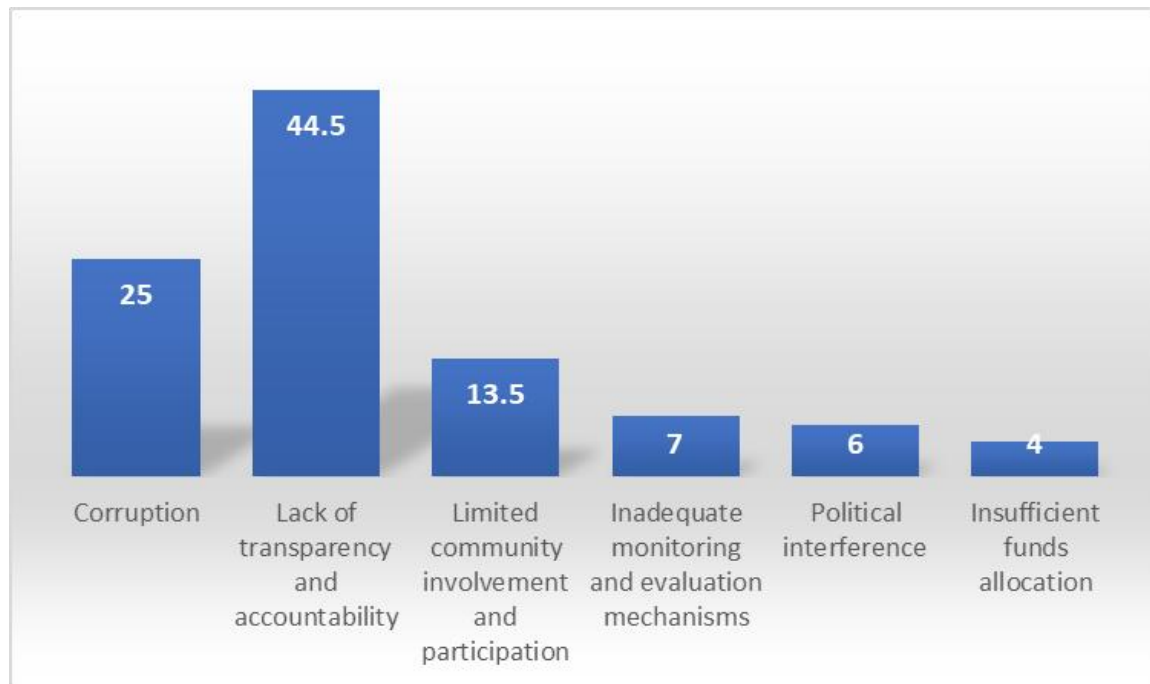


Figure 3: Main challenges behind the utilization of CDF in Tanzania

Source: Field Survey (2024)

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study on the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in delivering rural development in the Mwanza and Mara regions of Tanzania reveals a complex interplay of successes and challenges. While the CDF has facilitated some positive outcomes, such as improved access to basic services and infrastructure, significant disparities remain in how benefits are distributed across communities. Many residents express concerns about transparency, accountability, and the influence of local politics on project implementation. Ultimately, the findings suggest that while the CDF has the potential to contribute to rural development, its effectiveness is contingent upon enhancing governance mechanisms, fostering community participation, and ensuring equitable allocation of resources to maximize its impact on improving the livelihoods of rural populations.

Overall, we recommend the following policy strategies; Firstly, the Ministry of Finance and Planning, in collaboration with Parliament and Local Government Authorities (LGAs), should mandate that all CDF financial data including budgets, disbursements, procurement details, and implementation reports be published on official websites and community noticeboards. Additionally, digital dashboards and quarterly community meetings should be introduced to enable citizens to monitor progress and hold stakeholders accountable. Secondly, the President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) and the National Audit Office (NAO) should establish independent monitoring and evaluation (M&E) teams to oversee CDF-funded projects. At the local level, independent district-level M&E teams composed of civil society actors, technical experts, and community representatives should be created. These teams should conduct biannual evaluations, publish results, and utilize mobile tools that allow community members to report progress or irregularities in real time. Thirdly, to enforce anti-corruption measures and financial accountability, the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB), the Controller and Auditor General (CAG), and the Ethics Secretariat should conduct regular audits of CDF accounts and establish protected reporting mechanisms for whistleblowers. Furthermore, MPs and LGA officials should receive training on public finance management, ethics, and accountability. Lastly, to address political interference, Parliament and the Office of the Speaker should create a framework that separates political functions from fund management. Technically qualified committees should handle CDF project selection at the constituency level, and the role of MPs should be clearly defined and limited to oversight. Additionally, training should be provided to MPs on ethical engagement with development funds to discourage partisan or personal interest-driven project decisions.

A significant limitation of this study on the CDF in the Mwanza and Mara regions is the reliance on cross-sectional primary data, which, while rich in context and insight, may not fully capture the broader quantitative trends necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the CDF's impact in Tanzania. Future studies could benefit from incorporating a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights with quantitative secondary data to provide a more robust analysis of the CDF's effectiveness. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term impacts of CDF projects on rural development, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of sustainability and community resilience over time.

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